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THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .' James Connolly

## TWO LETTERS



## IRISH LIBERALISM?



## THE PARK DANES



# Lamb to the slaughter!

NOT SO long ago a run of the mill country bumpkin named Jim Gibbons, a Minister for Agriculture of the Fianna Fail persuasion, preened himself on RTE over a great triumph of statecraft: he had dished the malevolent Brits and secured free of duty entry of Irish lamb into France. He made no mention on that occasion, or since, that the result of that great victory for the Peterkins of the towns means that two loin chops in my butcher's and yours now cost a handy £1.80. Effectively, lamb, or mutton dressed as lamb, is dearer than most cuts of beef and as surely in the luxury class. *Cui bono?* Need I tell you that your old friend the farmer has had another bonus without as much as having to cry 'Shep!' Need I add that he's the same fellow who does not pay taxes of any kind: you pay them for him and you pay the extra prices as well.

Is there then something special about the farming class? Do they render some special service to the community, offer some expertise that deserves such unusual treatment and reward like, say, we may be glad to give a brain surgeon? Oddly, not a bit of it. An RTE 'Landmark' programme revealed that in Leitrim some of them go to the pub every evening, sup and play cards till all hours, and don't get up till eleven or so in the mornings. Except, of course, on Sundays when they are up that bit earlier for Mass and a sermon that'll tell them to safeguard their way of life (wouldn't they be the damn fools to swap it for any other?) Another recent survey, broadcast on RTE radio, showed that 85 per cent. of all farmers in the Republic had only a primary school education. And why should they go any further? Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Worthington, put her on the land! Farming in the Republic is the greatest discovery since sliced bread.

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STILL on farming. Michael Mullen, the big wheel of the Transport Union, has at last joined the chorus of protest against the failure of Fine Gael-Labour and once again Fianna Fail to tax the income of farmers. In these columns over the years I have pressed for this simple business to be brought into effect to no purpose and with few enough to back me. Dr. Newman, who can take time off his pastoral duties to propose Mick Lipper for the Dail, has not said a word about the inequity of leaving farmers free of taxes that are apparently all right for the rest of the community to bear. Nor has Lipper contributed anything to the present debate or any past one either.

Paddy Lane, the mouthpiece of the anti-national herd, fights every inch of the way. One of his observations on the media was that farmers pay a great deal of VAT on their farm implements which they do not claim back from the Revenue as 'Input'. And why don't the poor benevolent dears claim a refund? Let me tell you: because in order to get a refund they would have to produce dockets showing farm sales on which VAT would be payable as 'Output' and the VAT due on output would be a damn sight greater than the VAT recoverable on input. In other words Mr. Lane is a rogue, a rogue with a brogue.

Will anything be done about this disgraceful state of affairs? Very, very little. Just enough to fob off the mass of Income Tax payers, the unthinking mass. Action, of course, will be promised but nothing will be done. Already Paddy Lane is retreating slightly: he is accepting tax on the basis only of a notional valuation multiplier. Why not on actual income just like other people outside PAYE? Don't you know why? — because the valuation multiplier gives an income figure much, much less than Shep's owner is getting out of growing grass, which is something I could handily look after myself.

But the real thrust of this situation has been examined by

BY BERNOT MCEVOY

no one in public. Hidden away on the financial pages the other week was a survey of the actual value of land these days. It runs from £2,000 an acre in Carlow, Meath and Kildare to a useful £1,200 in Mayo. Simple arithmetic will show that the holder of 80 acres, and he's by no means a big man, is worth, without stock, from £160,000 to £96,000. Leave aside a half-dozen, a dozen if you like, professional men or businessmen in Limerick City and County and I challenge you to produce a non-farmer that can stand up and say he's worth anything like that at the end of the day.

To add insult to injury some of these whining farmers let their land on the 11-months' system at £110 an acre. With 80 acres that's £8,800 a year FREE OF ALL TAXES. By the way, in case you hear any of these fellows talking about those Orange so-and-sos remind him that he should have sympathy for the Orange farmer at any rate because in the North of Ireland farmers pay Income Tax just like anyone else. And they don't whine. Nor are they leeches on the rest of the community.

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JACK LYNCH, the leader of this political piggery where, as in Orwell's imagined land, some pigs are more equal than others, has publicly invited the electorate to throw him out of office if he does not solve the unemployment crisis. It is an invitation which, if he sticks to the terms (and that's doubtful) he will in due course be taken up on. He has not a hope *under capitalism* of solving that same problem; it is something that has got worse even since he came to office (the official statistics take no account of the schoolleavers, the married women who would work if they could get jobs, and the under-employed).

You are, of course, entitled to ask why I have as little faith in Lynch and his team. Here's why: in the OECD countries of Western Europe at this moment there are nine millions unemployed. Stop, say that figure again. Try to grasp what it means and now read on: those nine millions are only young men and women, the 18 to 25 years' group; it takes no account of the many, many other millions who have been out of work for at least two years who have no prospect of a job and for whom no effort is being made to find a job because all the western governments concerned see the task as beyond them. Small wonder that I don't share Jack Lynch's optimism.

In France and Belgium, for instances, employers take on for a premium a proportion of young people for six months. Many of these youngsters are expensively educated graduates: they are put to simple repetitious jobs in factories. Anything to keep them off the streets. In Italy, they are crowding the streets and causing real disturbances. Even oil-rich Norway can find no jobs for its youth. Yet Lynch can do better. Or so he says.

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OF COURSE there is a way to put our youth to work. But to adopt it one would have to raid the piggeries and the cow byres. One would have to nationalise the land, have everyone that can work producing at least enough for everyone to eat. It would mean spartan standards. But it would be a just society. That, of course, is socialism and that's a dirty word in Kildare Street and, we must not forget it, Maynooth. Yet even that explosive solution would not help for long if we continue to let our population go soaring.

# The Asahi closed shop

The recent bitter struggle fought by the majority of the Ferenka production workers for the right to join the union of their choice has few precedents in Irish trade union history. A previous attempt by another group of workers to leave the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and revert to their own union, the National Engineering and Electrical Trades Union, is worthy of some study at this time.

The attempt was made earlier this year by the maintenance craftsmen who were employed at the new Japanese Asahi plant at Killala, Co. Mayo. In Ferenka the I.T.G.W.U. was content to represent all the general workers only and to leave the fitters and the electricians to N.E.E.T.U. and the Electrical Trades Union respectively.

But this was not the original plan. The I.T.G.W.U. had intended to have a complete closed in Ferenka for all workers, including craftsmen. Limerick, however, had a large and well organised group of craft unions who were not prepared to allow the I.T.G.W.U. to move in to their traditional territory. So the I.T.G.W.U. had to settle for the general workers only.

The Asahi case was different from the Ferenka one for a number of reasons. The plant in Co. Mayo was built in an area of virtually no industrial or trade union history and where the craft unions were small and weak. The I.T.G.W.U. saw this situation and quickly stepped in to secure a closed shop agreement covering the 1,200 prospective workers, craftsmen and general operatives. The union appointed a full-time official for the area to ensure that the agreement was implemented.

The Asahi agreement, as well as stipulating that every worker had to be a member of the I.T.G.W.U. also gave the company the right to deduct union dues from the workers' wages. Craftsmen, who up to this time were members of their own unions, had come to the area in search of employment in the factory's maintenance department. These men and some local tradesmen who were members of the same craft unions were now in trouble. They had three choices open to them:

- (i) They could remain in their own craft unions and not take jobs at Asahi.
- (ii) They could leave their own unions and transfer to the I.T.G.W.U. and remain as members of this union in order to hold their jobs.
- (iii) They could join the I.T.G.W.U. solely for the purpose of obtaining employment and then revert to membership of the craft unions at the earliest opportunity.

The craftsmen could not afford to turn down the jobs and thereby leave the way open to unskilled and semi-skilled to do their work. The second option was also a Hobson's choice as they had by custom and practice been accustomed to representation by craft unions and, in the light of the I.T.G.W.U.'s membership and record, had little confidence in the ability of the I.T.G.W.U. to represent their best interests. The third choice was the only practical alternative open to the craftsmen.

During the construction of the factory the craft unions had made attempts to open negotiations with Asahi on the

question of trade union representation in the factory. When these initiatives came to nothing a ballot vote of all N.E.E.T.U. members, including those engaged on construction work on the site, was held to secure the craftsmen's approval for strike action. The members voted overwhelmingly in favour of a stoppage.

The strike started as planned on April 25th and lasted for four weeks. During this time a picket was maintained on the plant by some of the construction craftsmen and by all the maintenance craftsmen. The strike achieved a large degree of success, in spite of the fact that some members of the management staff attempted to influence the young general workers by threats based on the claim that Asahi was considering "pulling out" if the workers did not go back to work.

During the dispute the company secured a legal injunction against some of the men who were doing picket duty. But this did not hamper the strike or deter the fitters. As the struggle continued a one-day picket was placed on Liberty Hall in an effort to focus national attention on the undemocratic policy of the I.T.G.W.U.

The fact that the strike lasted for four weeks showed that the tradesmen were resolute in their determination not to be represented by the I.T.G.W.U. Eventually a proposal was put to the strikers to the effect that if they went back to work immediate negotiations would begin between the company and the craftsmen's unions. On their return to work the craftsmen kept up the pressure on the company by not doing overtime and by threatening legal action if union dues were continued to be stopped from their wages for the I.T.G.W.U.

Having received the assurance from the N.E.E.T.U. that "meaningful" talks were to take place between that union, Asahi and the I.T.G.W.U., the fitters believed that an early change was about to take place in the union representation in the plant. These discussions duly took place but the outcome was a complete anti-climax for the fitters. It transpired that a "peace" formula had been put forward by the N.E.E.T.U. negotiators to the effect that in future the craftsmen would have dual membership, that is that they would retain their membership of the N.E.E.T.U. but would also have to join the I.T.G.W.U. The craftsmen would be solely represented by the Transport Union in all official union negotiations with the firm, it was further stipulated.

Needless to say, the craftsmen unanimously rejected these proposals at a general meeting on the grounds that they were ludicrous recommendations. In the period since this rejection the N.E.E.T.U. has done nothing to support the democratic rights of the craftsmen to retain membership of their own union. As in Ferenka, the I.T.G.W.U. is determined to hold on to its closed shop to the bitter end, and to the exclusion of all other considerations.

Do I see any hope? Frankly, no. The rich will continue to get richer in the fair land of Erin and the poor progressively poorer until the young people hearken to the cry of the populist who, with gun well hidden, offers a new paradise under, of course, his dictatorship. And that, in the long run, perhaps even the short run, will land us with another Grocers' Republic not much different from the one we have. Different grocers that's all.

What is to be done? At every hand's turn show your distaste for your rulers, kick up an almighty row every time they appear in public, refuse to co-operate in any of their

schemes. And don't hesitate to laugh out loud at the upholders of the present scheme of things no matter how highly placed they are, or think they are. The truth, which should be apparent to all by now, is that not only are they empty-headed they are uncaring. And don't forget to give yourself a rap too: you put them there even if you did it only by default.

Have I nothing funny to say to you? But of course: Up the Republic! Like Jack Lynch, Des O'Malley and Co. that's the joke to drag out when you look at those two loin chops for £1.80 on your plate; it's always good for a laugh and little else.

# THE PARK DANES

## INTRODUCTION

Limerick, like many coastal towns in Ireland, was founded by the Vikings. Sometime towards the end of the 9th century the invaders sailed up the Shannon Estuary in search of loot from the many monasteries on its banks and islands. After some years of bloody skirmishing with the native Irish, they ceased their war-like pursuits and settled peacefully on an island called Inis Sebhton, about fifty-five miles up the estuary of the river. They built a clay and wattle settlement and commenced trading with the local clans, and it was from this crude settlement that the city of Limerick originated. The endless procession of Norman, Cromwellian and Dutch invaders, who succeeded the Vikings, each brought their own distinctive culture with them.

In spite of three calamitous sieges and many rebellions, the city, because of its strategic importance and commercial potential, grew and prospered. During the Industrial Revolution, a further invasion — this time a peaceful one — of technicians and artisans occurred. This was mainly due to the resurgence of church building after Catholic Emancipation and to the setting up of several bacon factories the excellence of whose products made Limerick a byword throughout the country. The city's four military barracks were garrisoned by English, Scottish and Welsh regiments, whose culture was mainly British and urban.

At the beginning of the 20th century the life style of the average Limerick man and woman was not much different from that of his or her counterpart in Edinburgh or Bristol. Yet, within the municipal boundary of the city, there flourished a small community with a mode of life which had remained homogeneous and rural for centuries. There is a widely held tradition in Limerick that these unique people are descended from the original Viking invaders. The district inhabited by this riverside colony is named Park.

## ORIGINS AND FOLKLORE

Park is a long, narrow tract of land on the north-east of Limerick. The area straddles the three townlands of Lower Park, Rhebogue and Singland. Bounded by the river Shannon on the Cläre side and bisected by a short stretch of the canal which links the river with the city, the district is further divided by the Limerick to Sligo railway line. The topography of Park, therefore, resembles a hot-cross bun, with the canal running from east to west and the railway line from north to south.

Up to 1840 Park was outside the city boundary. In that year most of the district was incorporated into the city and the remaining part was included in 1950. The area is, thus, clearly defined on old and modern maps of Limerick. But something more than a line on a map is needed to capture the characteristics of its inhabitants. These characteristics embrace and draw together its entire people in one tightly-knit community. So Park could well be described as more a state of mind and identity than a mere geographical location.

The land is divided into a patchwork or cultivated plots, most of them no bigger than market gardens. These fields are separated not by the usual ditch or fence, but by boulders known as bound stones. The same method of dividing land is used in Denmark. The industry, sobriety and phlegmatic temperament of the Park people would also support the claim to Scandinavian origins. Some of the oldest families have a folklore going back beyond the coming of the Danes to the early Christian period. Ancient Park family names are: Shanny, Hannan, Cunneen, McNamara, Cross, Cusack, Lawlor, Quilligan, Clancy, Cussen, Mullally, Troy, Woods, O'Halloran, Danagher, Kane, McMahan, Gallagher, Hynes, Ryan, and Kenny.

The McNamaras arrived from Clare during the early part of

the seventeenth century as refugees from the bitter fighting that took place there during the Cromwellian wars. The Shannys are the most numerous and some of this family were members of the Abbey Fishermen, a select group who fished the Shannon for salmon down through the centuries. The Cunneens are considered to be the oldest clans, with traditions going back to the time of Saint Patrick.

Many Park traditions are linked with St. Patrick in a peculiar love-hate way. There is a well dedicated to the saint where an angel is reputed to have appeared to Patrick, giving the place the name of Saingeal Pdraig, or Singland. A stone statue of the saint, built at the well, presides impassively over the townland.

A boulder at the base of a wall close to the well is venerated as the place where Patrick knelt in prayer. Two worn grooves in the stone are said to be the imprint of the saint's knees. The stone is polished like marble from the kisses of pious pilgrims through the centuries. An old tree stood beside the well festooned with the discarded crutches and rags of grateful suppliants. Patrick is reputed to have converted the chief of the Cunneens and baptised him at the well.

The 17th of March is celebrated as a major feastday and, up to recent times, an elaborate ritual of prayers and rounds was enacted at the well in the nine days preceding the holiday. The feast was also regarded as a "day out" for the Parkmen after the long winter. In the days when licensing laws were less liberal than they are today throats dry from praying were refreshed at Norrie Troy's shebeen on the Lower Park Road. This custom was known, here as elsewhere, as "wetting the shamrock".

The story is still told about how Patrick, on his journey from Cashel, made his way towards the Shannon to visit the

stronghold of the Dal Cais. Their chief was then at Singland holding the river fords while his men were conquering Thomond. According to the "Life" of the saint, "Cairtheann, son of Blod, believed in the Lord and Patrick baptised him at Saingil". The saint is also reputed to have converted the chief of the Cunneens and to have baptised him at the well.

St. Patrick's cemetery marks the site of the ancient church that was built on the slope above the well. An iron bell from this church was saved after the demolition of the building and, after being kept for a time in the house of a Parkman, has survived in Limerick to the present time. The stump of a round town was visible in the grounds of the churchyard up to the end of the eighteenth century. A carved 15th century stone from the church is set in the wall of a house owned by the Lawlor family. The stone is regarded less as a religious relic than a good luck object.

At the request of Reverend Michael Malone, the Fair Green Trustees enclosed the area around the well in 1853; fifty years later the present shrine was erected. In early Irish sources the hillocks near the well are called Cnocain Saingil, and after the district fell forfeit under Cromwell, Petty's Civil Survey of 1654 states that the present Fair Green was known as the "Green Land of Fahanaghnockane" (Faithche na gCnocan).

But despite the fact that Patrick's feastday rivals that of Christmas in importance, his eventful sojourn in the district was far from happy. His ass is said to have been relieved of his silver shoes by a Parkman, while another local, when asked for a sop of hay for the hungry animal, flatly refused the saint saying, "Sure, we are only draggin". St. Patrick is then supposed to have laid his famous curse, "That ye may be always draggin", on the Park people. But the historical accuracy of this persistent piece of folklore is more than a little diminished by the fact that asses were not introduced into Ireland until late in the seventeenth century.

St. Martin was also venerated in Park as the patron saint of mills. A prophesy that a mill in the district would mill blood is supposed to have been fulfilled when a mill at Singland was used to convert blood from the Limerick bacon factories into fertiliser. Ever since this mill has been known as the "Bloodmill". St. Martin was regarded as being mischievous and cantankerous. It may have been in an attempt to placate the saint that the name Martin was given to many children. The name was a common one in Park in the last century. St. Martin's Day occurs on October 30th and was marked by the practice of some superstitious beliefs. On the eve of the day a cock was killed in each home and the blood sprinkled at the four corners of the house and on the two doorsteps. The surplus blood was kept in a jar to be used as a cure or talisman.

St. John the Baptist's Day was celebrated on June 24th and, on the night before the feastday, another Park custom was enacted. At midnight a member of each family would walk up and down the family's plots carrying a lighting torch. The torch was made from a sod of turf, steeped in paraffin, placed inside a sop of hay and on top of a broom handle. The practise of warding off evil spirits for the coming year was carried out up to about fifty years ago.

"Hansel Monday" was also celebrated on the first Monday of the New Year. On that morning a young boy in each house would be wished a happy New Year and given a half crown handsel by his mother. The woman would then usher her son out through the back door of the house. After closing this door, the mother would open the front one and welcome the boy back into the kitchen. The son's wealth was short-lived, however, as the woman would quickly retrieve the handsel. Half-crowns were never too plentiful in Park.

The month of November was also a time when other customs were practised. Every night before the family went to bed two boiled potatoes and a glass of water would be left behind on the kitchen table to provide nocturnal sustenance for the "poor souls". A fire was kept burning through the

night to provide heat for the same airy spirits.

The elder tree, with its druidic associations, replaces the popular hawthorn as hedging in parts of Park. This, and the number of holy wells in the townland suggest the worship of older and darker gods before the coming of Patrick.

Though a strong thread of superstition runs through the fabric of their religious orthodoxy, the people are noted for their piety and devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. A secluded road which connects Park with Corbally is known as Rosary Road. It was at this spot that the people gathered to pray during the Penal Days. Anybody walking through the district when the day's work was over would hear the murmur of prayers coming from the open doors as each family knelt to recite the rosary. The Parkmen were all staunch members of the Redemptorist Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family, with their own special "sections", of which the Three Wise Kings, St. Benignus and St. Carthage were the best known. The men diligently attended their weekly meeting, travelling the three-mile journey to "The Fathers" by pony and cart, trap, float, side-car and on foot in all kinds of weather.

In the mid-nineteenth century many families were evicted, and one eye-witness of the last of these evictions, Tim Keehan, died in 1971. Many more people were forced to emigrate and this they did literally from their own doorsteps, walking the few steps from their houses to the canal boat. James Pope Hennessy, in his biography of Anthony Trollope, gives this poignant description of the plight of the poor emigrants:

*During and after the Famine the little place (Shannon Harbour) took on a new and different significance. For it was from here that the sickly, starving emigrants to Canada and the United States would take the boat to Dublin, another to Liverpool and be then herded into the coffin-ships – many of them former trade slavers – to endure a voyage across the Atlantic for seven endless – seeming weeks.*

*At Shannon Harbour at that time cakes or, rather, lumps of heavy corn-and-oatmeal bread, as dry as hard tack, were made in special bakeries and sold to the refugees. On this, and on water chancily supplied in the Liverpool ships, the emigrant families were expected to live until they reached the coastal ports of the New World . . .*

For those who stayed at home the stark outline of a gallows dominated their daily lives and presented a grim reminder of one of the horrors of the penal code. Up to the second half of the nineteenth century the execution of criminals was carried out in public at Gallows Green, a plateau on the southern end of Singland Hill, overlooking the city. A man could be hanged in those days for the trivial offence of poaching. The hangman, Patrick Ryan was reputed to have got his post as a reward for embracing the Protestant religion and was hated by the Park people. On retiring from his macabre profession, Ryan sought the shelter of the new County Gaol in Mulgrave Street. Here he spent his remaining days attending to the few flower beds that helped a little to brighten the many dark shadows that shrouded everything within the walls. He rarely ventured outside for fear of being attacked by relatives and friends of those he had hanged. He was reviled and shunned by everyone, and even inside the prison, where he was an unwilling prisoner, he was treated as a leper.

When Ryan died he was buried quietly in the old churchyard of St. Patrick, only a few hundred yards from the gallows on which he had hanged so many. The people of Park and the surrounding districts regarded the interment of the dead hangman as a gross insult to the many generations of their ancestors buried on the quiet hill. During the night the corpse was dug up and dragged around on a wicker pallet by a horse and then dumped into a ditch near the Spittal Boreen. When the remains were collected and reinterred, a guard was mounted over the grave for a few weeks. Immediately this protection was withdrawn, the corpse was again dug up and the same grisly drama enacted. Finally the authorities accepted the inevitable: what remained of the mutilated body was laid to rest for the last time inside the walls of the County Gaol, thus giving Patrick Ryan a refuge in death as in life.

# IRISH LIBERALISM?

BY JOHN CASEY

If by liberalism one means a respect for the views and religious and political beliefs of others and a certain receptiveness to new ideas and new thinking the only thing one can honestly say with regard to Ireland is that it has not, nor does not exist to any remarkable degree. Obviously a liberal view of life is tied to education but if one makes a comparison between this country and the United Kingdom on a basis of liberalism and educational opportunity we do not score.

In England, compulsory elementary education was not passed in law until 1880 and even then in the industrial working class ghettos it was resisted, with teachers being pelted and abused by irate parents who saw themselves being deprived of a source of income in the house.

No, the progress of educational thought and its transformation into schools and institutions were more or less on a par on the two islands. Yet few would deny today that the intellectual climate in England is more healthy and that minds are more open. Some of this may be found in Stalin's shrewd comment on the adaptability of the English for change and reform while yielding nothing of great importance. Still England is today a pluralist society accommodating millions with conflicting cultures, religious and political beliefs. Ireland is on the other hand introverted, bigoted, a backwater where local issues cloud national questions and international questions are seldom raised.

There has been a dearth of philosophers, thinkers, political theoreticians and, dare one say it, great national writers. What Irish writer has done for us what Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekov have done for the Russians? Do we have an understanding of ourselves as a nation which the English have thanks to Dickens? Joyce is a great novelist but are his novels about the Irish? They have primarily an autobiographical base and their primary thrust is to explore the human experience. Did Yeats and Synge know the common people of Ireland? Yeats certainly did not, and Synge, listening and noting the speech of Wicklow kitchen girls through a crack in the floor, shows how familiar he was with ordinary people. Swift is a great writer and a disturbing philosopher, but how many read him? O'Connor, O'Faolain, O'Flaherty and Corkery all have written about Irish life, poking and probing into niches and crannies where others had not or had not dared.

Does a panorama of Irish life emerge from the collected work of any of them? Corkery is supposed to have shut his eyes on a train journey through the English countryside lest he should see anything that would detract from his love for Ireland. It is unlikely that this exercise sharpened his vision greatly. O'Casey had some pungent things to say about the sniping escapade of 1916 but O'Casey lacked profundity. Kavanagh's "Great Hunger" and "Tarry Flynn" give us an insight into the thirties and McGahern shines an occasional beam on the fifties but there is not even a minor canvas a la Bates and Coppard, not to think of a major one. With regard to political philosophers there was the bourgeois pragmatist and nationalist Griffith, the confused and confusing Pearse, the romantic nationalists of Young Ireland, the demagoguery and populism of the Kerry squire O'Connell, the anarchism of the various secret societies, from the Ribbonmen to the I.R.A. and the lonely Marxist Connolly.

The most powerful influence on the intellectual life from the end of the eighteenth century cannot be in doubt: it was the Roman Catholic Church. The Church influenced thought in the Catholic business and political world and through its priests in the lowliest hovels of the land. As the priests were drawn from a certain section of the people, the attitudes of the Church were the same as that section in many areas. However as the Church was autocratic in its thinking, workings and structure it had the effect of stultifying and discouraging

freedom of thought and expression amongst the people. Today in the cities and larger towns people tend to think and act independently at least the independent thinkers do, and the Church's power, as instanced by the F.I.R.E. report, is on the wane, but this is a change that even now is only slowly coming about. In the past the Church's power in town and country was practically supreme.

The elitism which is an important element of autocracy duly transferred from religion to politics. O'Connell and his Catholic Emancipation campaign is an obvious direct graft and William Smith O'Brien's cabbage garden rebellion in which he requested the permission of local landlords to fell trees is yet another example of the gentry leading a befuddled peasantry.

The Fenians and the I.R.B. were led by middle class intellectuals and elements of the romantic nationalist gentry like Kickham, those who were hanged in Manchester—Allen, Larkin and O'Brien — were workers. Parnellism and Redmondism were manifestations of the benign progressive landlord leading the tenants. Sinn Feinery threw up a middle class journalist, a Blackrock mathematician and a Gaelic scholar. This elitism can be seen in today's two major parties which have been for fifty years controlled by the same few families.

Violence and fanaticism is another expression of it. Death is the final censorship and the gunman with the backroom gurus are the self-elected arbiters on the future of the nation and its people. The republicans are ever want to turn to the bomb and the gun. There is the mad bombing in the North and Sean Russell's mad campaign of the thirties. A corpse is a good substitute for a thought.

Death is the answer. Daithi O Conaill is cheered when he tells an Ard Fheis that hunger strikers had been deceived and if they had known the truth they would have fasted to death. Cheers. Maybe there are some black humourists in the party. Coupled with the martyr complex and the glory of blood sacrifice are deep religious feelings and a probity of lifestyle which contrast incongruously at the funeral of the victim.

In the fifties the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and other sects took their lives in their hands in their conversion campaigns. In one town witnesses, fleeing from drunken farmers, ran into the police barracks to be told by the local sergeant that he was considering charging them with a breach of the peace. And most Limerick people will be familiar with the Clonlara scandal when the Witnesses were brutally beaten out of the Co. Clare village and, in the subsequent court case, were bound to the peace for provocative behaviour! They can now walk the streets but they can still anticipate some hostility. Liberal, progressive people have succeeded in lifting some of the stigma associated with illegitimacy. A number of courageous people have set up family planning clinics to end the spectacle of the female baby factory. Others point out the beauty of sexual love in an attempt to push back the Pauline anti-feminism and puritannical sickness that have infected the country. Homosexuality is making a timid and timorous attempt at being accepted.

It is not just the Right who are guilty. The Dublin Left, sects, like S.F./W.P., claim a political infallibility which would put the Pope to shame. There is the lack of respect for sincerely held conservative views and an unwillingness to discuss honestly the opinions of others. The two-nations theory is capable of reducing nationalists to apoplexy. Queen Elizabeth is a subject for laughter and sarcasm, yet she occupies a place with Northern Protestants similar to the place the Church has with Southern Catholics. Drunkenness, ignorance and violence are all too often esteemed and intelligence and honesty scorned. An I.R.A. camp-follower once said to me: "The pen is more dangerous than the gun". We've had centuries of the gun; let's have a few years of the pen.

# TWO LETTERS

5 Little Gerald Griffin St.,  
Limerick.  
January 16th, 1978.

Mr. Brian McLoughlin,  
Irish Press,  
Davis Street,  
LIMERICK.

Dear Mr. McLaughlin,

Further to our brief telephone conversation on Thursday 12th inst., I would now like you to know that I have no wish to be interviewed by you or by any other journalist. This is what I would have told you had we met on Friday as suggested.

There are a number of reasons for my decision. Firstly, I have no intention of spending the rest of my life discussing the throwing of a rope ladder over a prison wall in London twelve years ago. I have no objections to discussing my book, which was an international bestseller in several languages, which gained the recognition of the Irish Government on literary grounds, and which is about to be filmed by one of the world's greatest film directors. Nor do I have any objections to discussing my next book which is to be published shortly.

But journalists, being the sort of people they are, are not interested in this aspect of my life. It is not sensational enough and does not lend itself to cheap headlines. And of course if they were to write about me along these lines it might show me in a favourable light — and, this being a country inhabited by Irishmen, that would never do! There is also the question of journalists having to write only that which will conform to the politics, philosophies and general whims of their wealthy and privileged employers.

The second reason for my declining an interview is, simply, that I have learned from bitter experience NEVER to trust a journalist. And particularly an Irish journalist — for some reason connected with the twisted Irish character they are the worst of all. It seems to me that the average Irish journalist (illiterate hack though he may be) tends to wield a pen dipped in vitriol, as though by doing so he were somehow purging his own dark frustrations.

One particular colleague of yours, a grubby little individual named Cormac McConnell, not only wrote scurrilously about me in the "Irish Press" but actually told lies. I suggest you contact him for confirmation.

I enclose copies of certain letters which I have had occasion to write to some of your fellow journalists. They speak for themselves. My letter to the "Limerick Leader" concerning Helen Buckley brought about a development which was disgustingly revealing and provided confirmation (if confirmation were needed) of just how low some journalists are prepared to stoop. Two of Helen Buckley's fellow reporters on the "Limerick Leader" tried to get this letter published in certain other papers! Another reporter made six photostat copies and sent them to all the Dublin papers! There's loyalty for you! If they will do that to each other, what will they not do to others?

Well, Mr. McLaughlin, have I made my point?

In fairness, it may very well be that you are an exception — but clearly that is a chance I cannot afford to take. After all, you work for the same bosses as thy others and, like the others, you must do what is expected of you or get out.

If you wish to comment on my observations I can be contacted at the above address any day after 5 p.m. My telephone number is as indicated.

Yours sincerely,  
Sean Bourke.

5, Little Gerald Griffin St.,  
Limerick  
January 17th, 1978.

Mr. Power,\*  
Administrator,  
St. John's Cathedral,  
Cathedral Place,  
LIMERICK.

Dear Power,

I have just received a copy of your parish magazine, "The Tower". The first (naturally!) article, signed "The Clergy of St. John's Cathedral", was very interesting, though of course it held no surprises.

Since you are the Administrator of the Cathedral you presumably take responsibility for this article, if indeed you haven't actually written it. And what a lot of unmitigated rubbish it is! If this puerile and illiterate drivel is acceptable to your parishioners and if such acceptance is a measure of their intelligence, then it is hardly surprising that you priests and your church have been getting away with your gigantic confidence trick for so long.

Hasn't anyone approached you to protest at being talked down to like a mentally retarded child? Hasn't anyone objected to this insulting paternalism? Hasn't anyone pointed out to you that even if they do choose to believe in some sort of "God" this does not entitle that "God's" self-appointed spokesman to impose his own ignorant and boorish thoughts on such believers?

"Because of their generosity recently on the occasion of our church door collection for the needy of the parish, we hope to be able to assure those among us who want for them, some of the material blessings of the season". How very kind of you! And no doubt there should be a certain amount of "sanctifying grace" in it as a bonus! Hasn't anyone ever told you that organised private charity is one of the greatest enemies of social progress and justice? It is not without significance that some of the most prominent promoters of private charity come from the ranks of the rich and the privileged. The longer the poor and exploited can be persuaded to subsidise each other, the longer will the exploiting rich be able to preserve their power and privilege. And that includes your church.

The recipients of your "charity" are entitled as of right to a roof over their heads; they are entitled to food in plenty; they are entitled to full employment; they are entitled to freedom from eviction and any other form of victimization; they are entitled to all forms of health care; they are entitled to unlimited education. They are entitled to all of these things without handing over cash. Note that I have not used the word "FREE". When the people do eventually win these basic human rights, they will only be getting what they have already paid for by the sweat of their brow. The difference will be that their earnings over and above what they are actually given in their wage packets, instead of going into the pockets of a church-supported capitalist class, will be returned to the workers in the form of the services mentioned above.

To return to your parish magazine; you might as well get as many of these insipid "messages" across to your hoodwinked parishioners as you can — while there is still time. For surely the day cannot be very far off when even the most guileless of your flock must see the light.

Yours sincerely,  
Sean Bourke

\*Father James Power is the Administrator of St. John's Cathedral who nominated Ald. M. Lipper for the Dail in last June's general election and who supported, financially and otherwise, Lipper's campaign. With the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Jeremiah Newman, Fr. Power is responsible for the controversial decision to renovate the altar of the Cathedral at a cost reputed to be well in excess of £100,000, including a special £10,000 carpet imported from Scotland. — "L.S".



"It's Christmas, I'm pregnant, God knows how, and now you tell me you forgot to book a room! Terrific!"

## THE LADS WITH THEIR APRONS ON

You masons brave, that courage have  
To execute each artist's plan,  
I pray give ear to what you hear,  
And that from a mason's son.  
Let Babel's height not you affright,  
Or the Temple that the heavens planned;  
That pile of state was made complete,  
And built by the lads with their aprons on.

On Egypt's plains they took great pains  
To raise the Pyramids so high;  
Who had them made, it is not said,  
Nor can they tell the reason why.  
How they had stood before the Flood,  
For to deny it no man can,  
But this they may sincerely say —  
They were built by the lads with their aprons on.

And, you masons bright, take no delight  
In what they call Freemasonry,  
For with their mock signs, their squares and lines,  
Or any of their damned mystery.  
For it is well they know it was by you  
That all their wondrous works were done;  
They'd pledge their souls to steal our trowels,  
And mock us with their silk aprons on.

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## JOURNALISTS

Anybody who was once caught up in journalism, or is caught up in it still, is under the cruel necessity of greeting men he despises, smiling at his worst enemy condoning actions of the most unspeakable vileness, soiling his hands to pay his aggressors out in their own coin. You grow used to seeing evil done, to letting it go; you begin by not minding, you end by doing it yourself. In the end, your soul, spotted daily by shameful transactions always going on, shrinks, the spring of noble thoughts rusts, the hinges of small talk wear loose and swing unaided. The . . . character loses its temper, talent degenerates, the belief in works of beauty evaporates. A man who wanted to take pride in his pages spends himself in wretched articles which sooner or later his conscience will tell him were base actions. You came on the scene . . . intending to be a great writer, you find you have become an impotent hack.  
(*"A Harlot High and Low"* by Honore de Balzac).

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